

PITY THE POOR ARTISTS

WILLIAM E. HICKSON

Sometime, when I have a few years to spare, I am going to run down the fable that has grown up around artists. I always wondered just when and where the idea started that artists were a people set apart, not just a section of our race in general. Being an artist myself, I resent both the idealism and the degradation that the world has endowed upon this simple everyday man who has chosen art as a profession.

Let's start from the time the poor creature begins to show some artistic ability; take myself as an example. I always liked to draw and copied (poorly, no doubt) anything that pleased my fancy — from Jiggs in the comic strips to the luscious, gaudy calendars that plumbers distribute around the New Year. Whenever friends or relatives came, my parents proudly brought these copies forth to bore the callers for hours. A few foolish souls considered them as wonderful as my parents did, so, with clucking of tongues, past relatives would be verbally exhumed — Aunt Minnie's artistic ability to paint china, Grandma Morgan's skill with the embroidery needle, and Cousin Willie's (the house painter, you know) talent for mixing any color you wanted for the front parlor. During all this discussion of just where my artistic ability came from, I would sit on the edge of my chair, embarrassment hanging over me like a cloud, as the honey dripped off their glances and voices in my direction. I suffered all this because I liked to draw, and my story is a fairly general one.

Then too, there is the matter of being perpetually imposed upon. Many people feel that being an artist isn't a profession but just a convenience for any odd jobs that they would like done. The artist's

family and many of his friends want him to dash off a few posters for the Ladies Aid Bazaar, say about twenty, and it would be so nice to have them tomorrow so that they could put them up. Any old cardboard would do that the artist happened to have, and he could use his own paints too — and thanks so much; you must come to the bazaar and buy lots of nice things — so reasonable. Requests like these are often and from many sources.

Why do people persist with the idea that artists are endowed by the angels (or is it the magic touch of a fairy) with the ability to paint? The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker attain their rank by experience in their trade, but the artist is given his talent by some supernatural means — so the general public believes. Whoever thought up the idea that painters sit by their easels and wait for the inspiration to be turned on like water from a faucet is only one step above a moron. I can imagine nothing funnier (if it were not so nearly true) than an artist sitting down to work at eight o'clock waiting for his guardian angel to show up to work to inspire him. If said angel was not a dependable sort and was habitually late, or even didn't appear, the poor fellow would eat very little. On second thought, this may be the reason why so many artists seem to starve in garrets. I have learned in the hard old school of experience that artists must work as hard as any man to be successful in their careers. The language "easy life of the artist" is just another legend. 'Tis a pity the public isn't right, as it would be an easy life if you had a really good angel.

I suppose that you have read in our daily papers about the fabulous prices that

some paintings bring. It would seem that an artist is extremely well-paid, but, alas, the painters of these pictures have long since been dead, and probably died of starvation at that. Maybe an artist is never very successful alive. You will probably find, if you know artists personally, that even though they may have a certain fame, their bread and butter comes from sources other than their paintings. Your grocer is usually much more of a financial success than the artist.

As far as the public believes, the artist's morals are something out of Boccaccio. From the pulp magazines to some of the better novels, he is chosen as a deep-dyed villain. The general impression is that he spends most of his time in ultra smart penthouses plying maidens with strong liquors with intent on their virtue. He has taken the place of the cruel landlord of the old Victorian melodrama — treacherous, sneering, but with a dash of sophistication for our modern public. He isn't a normal individual; he's a heel. The artist's work has become a byword. "Come up and see my etchings" or variations on that theme have become quite a well-known caption of cartoons in the bawdier magazines. How did all these immoral impressions start? I'd really like to know. I know dozens of artists who are married and live happy, normal lives in much the same manner as the average American family, but you seldom hear of them. Penthouses and strong

liquors are far too expensive a luxury for any of the artists I know — but I have had the experience that people, and especially girls, become wary and strained when they hear of my profession. I suppose that some of the immoral part of the legend has grown up because of the public attitude on drawing from the nude. Mr. Public doesn't seem to understand the difference between the words *nude* and *naked*. Every artist has had sly, or even lewd, inquiry on models in life classes and is supposed to put up with these personal insults, both to himself and to the model, with good humor. Any true explanation as to the impersonal attitude between artist and model is laughed off or silently disbelieved.

Yes, pity the poor artist. In spite of all these drawbacks he has stuck to the game through starvation and adversity, and loved it. Many of my friends, and even I, knew what we were getting into when we selected a career, but those of us who were really interested in art have left the chosen pathway only long enough to make sufficient money to continue along it. Our morals are average; our pocketbooks are empty; we work hard at our painting in spite of general ideas to the contrary. It seems to me that the trials and tribulations of the profession are enough without unjust darts being thrown at its followers, so let's take pity on the artist and stick to facts; I, personally, will rejoice.

SOLILOQUY AT DUSK

BOB HARRIS

Turn low the lights
Half shut the shutters
Seek out the comfort
Of your favorite easy chair
And there

In the intermingled mists
Of lights and of shadows
I shall relate to you
The story
Of Robert Lee